

17 December 1971

NSC review completed

MEMORANDUM

25X1 SUBJECT: [redacted] Message [redacted]  
dated 17 December 1971

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25X1 REFERENCE: [redacted] Saigon Message [redacted]  
dated 4 December 1971

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The NSC Staff with the concurrence of the Departments of State and Defense and the CIA requests that the following message be passed to Ambassador Bunker.

"1. We have carefully reviewed conversation reported in referenced message and agree with your basic conclusion that we should sit tight and await another call. At the same time, we think we should consider how we should handle such a call if and when it is received.

25X1 "2. We concur with Mission assessment that other side's primary interest is in release [redacted] and accordingly that he is our major trading bait. We think our initial line in the next call should remain unchanged. If other side's interest [redacted] is as strong as Mission suggests, it is possible the caller may agree to exchange [redacted] as first step. However, it is fully possible that the next call, like previous calls, may conclude with continued adamant stand by other side of demanding release [redacted] as a package in exchange for release of [redacted] unspecified others.

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25X1 "3. [redacted] one reason we  
25X1 have preferred [redacted] exchange as first step is to guard against possibility that this entire ploy has been conceived of as a trick for the

DPMO review(s) completed.

25X1 State Dept. review completed SECRET/ [redacted]

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purpose of obtaining release [ ] without giving anything in return. We cannot rule out possibility that there would be no repeat no U.S. prisoners at the exchange point, and that other side might attempt to [ ] force if necessary, without giving up anything in return. From our point of view, [ ] first step would serve to smoke out this possibility and could set pattern for further releases [ ]

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"4. Looking at it from other side's point of view, however, they may also be concerned about modalities of release. Specifically, Communist side may fear that initial [ ] exchange would become widely publicized thus making it difficult or impossible to arrange second exchange. Publicity could also require awkward internal explanations among VC regarding release of U.S. prisoners. VC may also fear bad faith on our part, suspecting we might spring trap on them, seizing U.S. prisoners without releasing [ ]

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"5. If another call is received, we propose that Station begin by repeating line used in December 4 conversation. If caller agrees to [ ] exchange, or comes up with new alternative [ ] that would of course be welcome and should be pursued to conclusion.

"6. However, if caller sticks with previous line, we propose that Station, after waiting out caller to make sure he has no new offer, use conversational scenario along following lines:

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Begin text: 'I understand what you say.  
You are interested only in the [ ]  
[ ] exchange for these two  
men you are prepared to release [ ]  
some others.' That is not enough. The two  
prisoners you want are specific important individuals.  
We need to know how many prisoners and which ones  
would be released in exchange. Obviously, there must  
be clear understanding for an exchange to take place.  
We have proposed that we should good faith on both  
sides [ ] as a  
first step, but you have refused that offer.

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'Accordingly, let me state clearly, we are prepared to release [ ] but we must have concrete assurance on how many and which prisoners you will release in exchange. We also need a clear understanding as to how and where the exchange will take place.

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'In view of the importance of the prisoners you have asked for, we ask that you arrange the release of at least ten prisoners in exchange [ ]

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'Will you be able to arrange the release of these prisoners? Can you give me an answer now? I repeat, we are prepared to release both [ ] but we need to know who will be released in exchange.

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'(If caller says he needs time to answer, he should be asked to call back in three days. If he states that he cannot arrange the release of more prisoners, he should be reminded of his repeated references to "others" [ ] and asked to provide specifics. He should be asked for names of the men to be released, but this should not become a sticking point. If he says ten is too many, he should be told we consider this an appropriate number to exchange for prisoners as important [ ] and asked to call back with his answer. Conversation could be continued without waiting for an answer on this point as follows:)

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'If you agree to the terms I have proposed, then we must discuss the exact arrangements for the release. There must be understanding that the prisoners to be released by each side will be brought to Ta Gang Robon at the agreed time. There should

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be a military standdown in that area for a radius of five kilometers. We will bring the prisoners to be released in helicopters, one prisoner for each helicopter. That way there will be seats to take away the ones you will release.

'We propose that the time be set for 1600 hours one week from today. Do you agree to that? The first helicopter will set down at that time with one of the prisoners you have asked for. The second helicopter will be nearby and will bring the second prisoner as soon as the first helicopter leaves with some of the prisoners you will release. [REDACTED]

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'If the prisoners you will release are ready to go, there will be no delay in the arrival of the second helicopter. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] we will expect to receive word from the first prisoners you release that the others are waiting on the ground ready to be released. Any sign of military action by your side will invalidate these arrangements. You have our assurance that there will be no military action by our side.' (End of text.)

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"7. Since the foregoing scenario foresees possible release [REDACTED] it should be discussed with appropriate levels in GVN to obtain their concurrence. We believe proposal as outlined fully protects GVN's and our interests and contains best chance of obtaining actual release of U.S. prisoners in near future.

"8. Request your early comments."

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SECRET [REDACTED]